

## **PATCH WIRELESS TEST FIXTURE**

### **TECHNICAL FIELD**

5           [001] Embodiments are generally related to sensing methods and systems. Embodiments are also related to pressure and temperature sensors. Embodiments are additionally related to surface acoustic wave (SAW) devices and sensors, and in particular to testing methods and systems thereof.

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### **BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION**

          [002] Various sensors are known in the pressure and temperature sensing arts. The ability to detect pressure and/or temperature is an  
15    advantage to any devices which are under constant temperature and which can be severely affected by temperature conditions. An example of such a device is an automobile tire, which of course, experiences variations in both temperature and pressure. Many different techniques have been proposed for sensing the pressure and/or temperature in tires, and for delivering this  
20    information to the operator at a central location on the vehicle so that he knows that a tire is at low or high air pressure.

          [003] Such sensors generally communicate with the vehicle so that the sensed pressure and/or temperature are displayed to the operator when  
25    the vehicle is moving, i.e. the wheel rotating relative to the body of the vehicle. Such devices are generally relatively complex and expensive or alternatively are not particularly robust.

          [004] Some tire pressure and/or temperature sensor systems  
30    incorporate a sensor that is fixed to the body so no rotating electrical contact between the rotating wheel and the chassis is required. In this system, a sensor rod is deflected by contact with the tire sidewall when the sidewall of the tire is deformed as occurs when the tire pressure is low. This system

provides an indication of low tire pressure but is not robust. For example mud or other debris on the wheels may cause faulty readings. Furthermore, this system provides an indication only when the tire pressure is reduced significantly as is necessary for significant tire bulge to occur. Clearly such a  
5 system simply cannot provide a reading of actual tire pressure.

[005] In another form of fixed sensor the height of the vehicle can be detected and when the height is reduced, it is deemed tire pressure is low. However, if the tire is in a rut or is parked on uneven ground, a faulty low-  
10 pressure reading is likely to be generated.

[006] More complicated systems are capable of monitoring tire pressure. For example, some pressure sensor systems utilize a rotating encoder formed by a multi-polar ring of magnetic segments of different  
15 polarity that are distributed circumferentially in a regular and alternating manner. A transmitter coil coaxial with the ring and a fixed pickup (an induction coil system) is energized by alternating electrical current flowing through the transmitter coil to generate a magnetic field superimposed on the magnetic field created by the multi-polar ring generates a signal picked up  
20 and delivers a signal relating the rotating characteristic of the wheel and thus, the state of the tire.

[007] Some tire pressure systems also utilize a wheel system wherein each sensor on each wheel is provided with a radio transmitter that  
25 transmit the information on tire pressure, etc. from the wheel to a radio receiver on the body of the vehicle and this transmitted signal is decoded to provide information on tire pressure etc. and makes it available to the operator. Conventional wireless systems, however, are not durable and are expensive to design and produce.

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[008] One type of sensor that has found wide use in pressure and temperature sensing applications, such as, vehicle tires, is the Surface

Acoustic Wave (SAW) sensors, which can be composed of a sense element on a base and pressure transducer sensor diaphragm that is part of the cover. For a SAW sensor to function properly, the sensor diaphragm should generally be located in intimate contact with the sense element at all  
5 pressure levels and temperatures.

[009] To compensate for expansion in the packaging, the sense element and sensor diaphragm must be preloaded when they are assembled to shift the output frequency a known amount, which ensures contact at all  
10 times. In conventional sensor designs, an interference fit between the cover and base can maintain a preload until the cover and base are locked in place by welding, soldering or other connecting means.

[0010] In order to properly configure a sensor, such as a SAW sensor,  
15 the sensing device must undergo rigorous testing to ensure that the device will work properly under a variety of temperature and pressure conditions. A system should be implemented in which to test overall functionality in an environment similar to the type that the sensor will ultimately face. For example, a SAW sensor is ideally suited for use in sensing tire temperature  
20 and pressure conditions. The sensing device must be able to react to high and low temperatures (e.g., 100 °C to -40 °C), while also being able to react to varying pressure ranges (e.g., 0 psi to 150 psi). It therefore necessary to test the sensor to verify functionality over variations in temperature and pressure, and also to ensure that the sensor external components (e.g.,  
25 sensor housing) can withstand these varied conditions.

[0011] Additionally, tests must be performed to ensure that sensor device components such as the housing will not be affected by RF frequencies due to the presence of wireless components, such as antennas.  
30 The housing and base of the sensor must also not be placed into a condition in which an electrical short runs from the housing to the base, causing a frequency shift or error in the sensor measurements. A need thus

exists for an improved method and system for properly testing sensor devices, such as SAW sensors. It is believed that providing configuring a proper patch system, particularly one involving wireless capabilities, will greatly enhance sensor testing, and thus provide for sensors that are

5 ultimately more efficient and sturdier than presently implemented sensors.

## BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0012] The following summary of the invention is provided to facilitate  
5 an understanding of some of the innovative features unique to the present  
invention and is not intended to be a full description. A full appreciation of  
the various aspects of the invention can be gained by taking the entire  
specification, claims, drawings, and abstract as a whole.

10 [0013] It is, therefore, one aspect of the present invention to provide  
an improved sensor testing method and system.

[0014] It is another aspect of the present invention to provide for a  
sensor testing method and system, which can be utilized to test the  
15 effectiveness of surface acoustic wave (SAW) sensor devices.

[0015] The aforementioned aspects of the invention and other  
objectives and advantages can now be achieved as described herein. A  
sensor testing system and method are disclosed herein. In general, a  
20 pressure rail having a top surface and a bottom surface and one or more  
pressure inlets to a pressure channel can be located within the pressure rail.  
The pressure channel can be drilled into the pressure rail. A plurality of  
patch depressions can be formed into a plurality of sealing surfaces on the  
top surface of the pressure rail upon which a patch is positioned. A plurality  
25 of antenna blocks is generally disposed upon the pressure rail, wherein each  
antenna block thereof includes at least two antennas. Two antennas can be  
connected to a respective antenna block among the plurality of antenna  
blocks utilizing a silicone adhesive. Each antenna block is respectively  
located on the pressure rail in order to provide wireless data indicative of  
30 pressure and temperature conditions associated with each patch among the  
plurality of patches.

[0016] Additionally, a plurality of BNC connectors can be respectively connected to the plurality of antenna blocks, wherein each BNC connector thereof is respectively connected to and protrudes from each antenna block thereof. Each sealing surface among the plurality of sealing surfaces can be  
5 configured to contain a groove that retains a respective O-ring in place. The patch itself can comprise a SAW patch. Also, a plurality of cap screws can be provided for holding in place an antenna block among the plurality of antenna blocks and for sealing the respective O-ring against a respective antenna block among the plurality of antenna blocks. The pressure rail  
10 therefore can generally function as a SAW tire pressure measurement patch wireless test rail. The SAW patch reacts to both temperatures and pressure while being interrogated wireless as a fixed distance in order to collect test data indicative of the SAW patch.

## BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

5 [0017] The accompanying figures, in which like reference numerals refer to identical or functionally-similar elements throughout the separate views and which are incorporated in and form a part of the specification, further illustrate the present invention and, together with the detailed description of the invention, serve to explain the principles of the present invention.

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[0018] FIG. 1 illustrates a top view of a wireless sensor testing system, which can be implemented in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention;

15 [0019] FIG. 2 illustrates a side perspective view of the wireless sensor testing system depicted in FIG. 1, in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention;

20 [0020] FIG. 3 illustrates a front view of the wireless sensor testing system depicted in FIGS. 1-2, in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention;

25 [0021] FIG. 4 illustrates a right side view of the wireless sensor testing system depicted in FIGS. 1-3, in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention; and

[0022] FIG. 6 illustrates top and side views of a sensor, which can be tested by the testing system depicted in FIGS. 1-4, in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

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## DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

5 [0023] The particular values and configurations discussed in these non-limiting examples can be varied and are cited merely to illustrate at least one embodiment of the present invention and are not intended to limit the scope of the invention.

10 [0024] FIG. 1 illustrates a top view of a wireless sensor testing system 100, which can be implemented in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention. FIG. 2 illustrates a side perspective view of the wireless sensor testing system 100 depicted in FIG. 1, in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention. FIG. 3 illustrates a front view of the wireless sensor testing system 100 depicted in FIGS. 1-2, in  
15 accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention. FIG. 4 illustrates a right side view of the wireless sensor testing system 100 depicted in FIGS. 1-3, in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

20 [0025] System 100 generally includes a pressure rail 122 upon which are disposed a plurality of antenna blocks 102, 104, 106, 108, and 110. Pressure rail 122 includes a pressure inlet 124. Five individual depressions can be cut into the top surface of pressure rail 122 for placement and orientation of a SAW patch, such as, for example, SAW patch 136. Note  
25 that SAW patch 136 can be formed from a material such as rubber. An example of one depression cut into the top surface of pressure rail 122 is patch depression 134 depicted in FIG. 2. Pressure inlet 124 forms part of a pressure channel, which can be drilled through the center of pressure rail 122 to help pressurize a SAW button face that can be molded into each  
30 SAW patch (e.g., SAW patch 136). Each of the five locations upon which antenna blocks 102, 104, 106, 108, and 110 are located contains a dovetail groove milled into the sealing surface that holds a silicon O-Ring in place,

while also assisting in retaining the O-ring. AN example of such a dovetail groove is O-ring groove 132 depicted in FIG. 2. Each O-ring helps to seal against the respective antenna block that is held in place with four cap screws. For example, antenna block 110 is held in place by cap screws 124,  
5 126, 128 and 130. Each of the antenna blocks 102, 104, 106, 108, and 110 can be configured to include two antennas mounted within respective antenna grooves, 140, 142, 144, 146, and 148, wherein each of the antennas are held in place with an adhesive, such as, for example, a silicone adhesive. Each of the two antennas can be wired to a respective BNC  
10 connector that protrudes from the top of each antenna block. For example, antenna block 110 is associated with a BNC connector 120. Antenna blocks 102, 104, 106, 108, and 110 are respectively associated with BNC connectors 112, 114, 116, 118, and 120.

15 FIG. 5 illustrates a block diagram of a system 500 for SAW testing, in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention. Note that in FIGS. 1-5, similar or identical parts or elements are generally indicated by identical reference numerals. Thus, according to system 500, each BNC connector 112, 114, 116, 118, and 120 can be connected to a test system  
20 502 that monitors and regulates temperature and pressure conditions. In general, system 500 can be adapted for use as a SAW tire pressure management patch wireless test rail, which includes approximately five rubber patches that can be pressurized up to 150 psi, and which can also be heated up to approximately 135 degrees Celsius, while an embedded  
25 antenna interrogates a SAW patch, such as, for example, SAW patch 136. System 500 allows the SAW patch to react both to temperature and pressure while being interrogated at a fixed distance in order to help collect final test data.

30 FIG. 6 illustrates top and side views of a sensor 600, which can be tested by the testing system 100 depicted in FIGS. 1-3, in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention. Sensor 600 generally

comprises a SAW button sensor or sensory assembly. Sensor 600 includes a sensor base which is composed of base portions 620, 612 and 624. Two pins 608 and 610 can be mounted and/or connected to the sensor base. Such pins 608 and 610 can be located within areas 630 and 632 of the sensor base. Sensor 600 generally includes a sensor cover 606 which can be configured to include a dimple 602. Note that the particular shape and size of dimple 602 can vary, depending on particular applications. The dimple 602 depicted in FIG. 6 is thus presented for illustrative purposes only and the size and shape thereof are not considered limiting features of the present invention.

[0026] A sensor element 628 can be located adjacent to or on base portion 612 in a manner that that permits clearances to form between sensor cover 606 and the sensor base composed of base portions 620, 612 and 624. A sensor diaphragm 603 can be incorporated into the sensor cover 606. The cover 606 can be located the sensor base such that the dimple 602 is in intimate contact with the sensor element 628 at all pressure levels and temperatures thereof.

[0027] It can be appreciated from FIG. 6, that instead of using an interference fit between the cover and base, the components thereof can be designed to form a clearance or gap between the cover and base. Such a design does not rely on an interference between the two parts to maintain preload, but instead can utilize welding, soldering or other connecting means to lock the components in position at the time the cover is assembled to the base.

[0028] The components can be designed such that even if the cover is at its smallest inside dimension within the tolerance range and the base is at its largest outside dimension within the tolerance range there will be clearance between them when they are assembled together. Thus, a clearance should exist generally between the cover and base even if the

cover is at its smallest dimension within the tolerance range and the base is at its largest dimension within the tolerance range. The intent of such a feature is to produce the parts at their nominal dimension.

5           [0029] Based on the foregoing it can be appreciated that  
embodiments disclosed herein relate to a sensor testing system and method.  
In general, a pressure rail having a top surface and a bottom surface and  
one or more pressure inlets to a pressure channel can be located within the  
pressure rail. The pressure channel can be drilled into the pressure rail. A  
10   plurality of patch depressions can be formed into a plurality of sealing  
surfaces on the top surface of the pressure rail upon which a patch is  
positioned. A plurality of antenna blocks is generally disposed upon the  
pressure rail, wherein each antenna block thereof includes at least two  
antennas. Two antennas can be connected to a respective antenna block  
15   among the plurality of antenna blocks utilizing a silicone adhesive. Each  
antenna block is respectively located on the pressure rail in order to provide  
wireless data indicative of pressure and temperature conditions associated  
with each patch among the plurality of patches.

20           [0030] Additionally, a plurality of BNC connectors can be respectively  
connected to the plurality of antenna blocks, wherein each BNC connector  
thereof is respectively connected to and protrudes from each antenna block  
thereof. Each sealing surface among the plurality of sealing surfaces can be  
configured to contain a groove that retains a respective O-ring in place. The  
25   patch itself can comprise a SAW patch. Also, a plurality of cap screws can  
be provided for holding in place an antenna block among the plurality of  
antenna blocks and for sealing the respective O-ring against a respective  
antenna block among the plurality of antenna blocks. The pressure rail  
therefore can generally function as a SAW tire pressure measurement patch  
30   wireless test rail. The SAW patch reacts to both temperatures and pressure  
while being interrogated wireless as a fixed distance in order to collect test  
data indicative of the SAW patch.

[0031] The SAW Tire Pressure Measurement Patch Wireless test rail disclosed herein can be configured to permit five or more rubber patches to be pressurized up to 150psi and to be heated up to 125 degrees Celsius while the imbedded antenna interrogates the SAW patch. This allows the SAW patch to react both to temperature and pressure while being interrogated at a fixed distance to help collect final test data.

[0032] The test fixture can be configured using Ultem<sup>®</sup> material for the top antenna blocks and bottom pressure rail. Not that an example of Ultem<sup>®</sup> material that may be adapted for use in accordance with an embodiment is an Ultem<sup>®</sup> resin. An Ultem<sup>®</sup> resin is an amorphous thermoplastic polyetherimide offering outstanding high heat resistance, high strength, modulus and broad chemical resistance. Ultem<sup>®</sup> is a trademark of the General Electric Corporation. It can be appreciated of course that other types of amorphous thermoplastic polyetherimide materials may be adapted for use with embodiments and that the use of Ultem<sup>®</sup> material is described herein for general illustrative purposes.

[0033] The pressure rail generally contains five or more (or less) individual depressions cut into the top surface for placement and orientation of the SAW Patch. A pressure channel can be drilled through the center of the rail to help pressurize the SAW button face that is molded into the patch. Each of the five locations contains a dovetail groove milled into the sealing surface that holds a Silicon O-ring in place that also helps retain the o-ring. The O-ring seals off against the Antenna block that is held in place with four cap screws. The Antenna block contains two antennas mounted inside to grooves held in place with RTV Silicone adhesive. The two antennas can be wired to the BNC connector that protrudes out from the top of the Antenna block. The BNC connector can be connected to a test system for monitoring and regulating the temperature and pressure.

[0034] The embodiments and examples set forth herein are presented to best explain the present invention and its practical application and to thereby enable those skilled in the art to make and utilize the invention. Those skilled in the art, however, will recognize that the foregoing description  
5 and examples have been presented for the purpose of illustration and example only. Other variations and modifications of the present invention will be apparent to those of skill in the art, and it is the intent of the appended claims that such variations and modifications be covered.

10 [0035] The description as set forth is not intended to be exhaustive or to limit the scope of the invention. Many modifications and variations are possible in light of the above teaching without departing from the scope of the following claims. It is contemplated that the use of the present invention can involve components having different characteristics. It is intended that  
15 the scope of the present invention be defined by the claims appended hereto, giving full cognizance to equivalents in all respects.